Memo to File 9/20/92

Peggy Robohm called this afternoon. Received my e-mail. Suggested I hold off approaching O'Neill until after his election campaign so request won't get lost in pile.

Based upon what she's telling me about her O'Neill interview, there may be serious difficulties. Robert Frazier testified that S & O arrived at the Lab with the bullet fragments at 1:45 am (5 H 73), which means they must have left Bethesda no later than approximately 1:15 or 1:20 am.. We know that the doctors were still working on the body at that time. Yet, O'Neill describes to her how the body was fixed up by the morticians, the hair was combed, and the casket was closed. How much of this is his own personal knowledge, and how much has he read or imagined he saw? Is he reacting to Lifton's thesis and exaggerating beyond his own personal knowledge? Was Frazier's testimony either mistaken or altered in the printing to make it look as though the FBI left early? Look at S & O's internal interview out of the FBI FOIA release (where they recreate Specter's interview with them, 62-109060-2637 Rosen/Belmont dated 3/12/64). They agreed the autopsy could have been over between 12 and 1 AM -- consistent with what I understood all along about their time of departure (allowing for them to phone in a brief report before going to the Lab), and with Frazier's testimony (allowing for drive time from Bethesda to the old Lab), but totally inconsistent with what he's telling Peggy now.

(at 2:45am) PBF

Clint Hill inspected the body after the autopsy and while the morticians were working, but the body was still naked. (Hill testimony 2 H 143; written report CE 1024 at 18 H 744-45; see also, Rowley's report of 3/19/64 (CE 1026 at 18 H 810, 815). McHugh wrote to Time Magazine that the doctors were working on him until 3 A.M., Letter to the Editor from Godfrey McHugh, Time Magazine, February 16, 1981, page 5. The morticians told Lifton they were waiting around a long time before being permitted to go to work. See Lifton's Best Evidence, Chapter 30 (John Van Hoesen quote). That jibes with Manchester. (See Manchester hardcover at 420, 427). Humes himself says they were there until 5 AM assisting the morticians in their preparations (an apparent error since the body arrived at the White House at 4:24 AM; Kellerman, Hill and contemporary news accounts agree), see 7 HSCA 256 (Humes' interview with forensic pathology sub-panel). And see the JAMA interview. Some of Lifton's and Livingstone's witnesses agree that the autopsy lasted until well after midnight. Art Smith's interview with Ebersole is in accord. How could O'Neill be under the impression that it ended at around midnight or 1 AM, report in their main report that they left immediately after it was over, arrive at FBI lab at 1:45 a.m. as Frazier testified, yet still claim to have witnessed the final combing of the hair and the closing of the casket? Were all these people attending the same autopsy? (Sylvia's decoy body giggle.) Is it that everyone else is lying to establish that Sibert & O'Neill weren't there the whole time? (Unlikely.)

This goes back to my "second look autopsy" theory that Lifton and I argued about years ago while he was writing his book and I was still puzzling things out. (I long ago realized why he was arguing with me and demanding a copy of my

written research; he was going in the direction of pre-autopsy surgery.) If O'Neill is telling the truth of his own personal knowledge, could they have taken JFK out of the casket once S & O left, and gone back to work on him? Hardly sounds plausible and there isn't a scintilla of testimony for it (unless everyone is plain lying). Did they put on a show for the FBI just to get rid of them? Wierd. Why go to all that trouble? Although this possibility cannot be completely dismissed: Why is there no mention of the Y-incision in the S & O report? No mention of removal or weighing of organs. They report that at the conclusion of the autopsy the morticians came in. Period, end of story. No further narration. Their report doesn't say that they were there when the body was taken back to the White House.

Why did Sibert and O'Neill feel it appropriate to report on Burkley's attempt to limit the autopsy in a separate investigative insert instead of their main report?

Allegation: Jackie Kennedy wanted a closed casket. How does O'Neill know this? It was the very idea that the casket might be open that Burkley used as an excuse for limiting the autopsy.

Allegation: Jackie Kennedy wanted only a limited autopsy. How does he know this? From anywhere other than Burkley's mouth? I don't believe she had the slightest idea of what was going on. All Burkley had told her (according to his own statememt about their conversation on the plane, CE1126) was that they had to remove the bullet.

Nailing down the truth of this episode is infuriating.

Peggy's understanding with O'Neill was that the interview was for research purposes only unless he says otherwise. Seems there are personal things in there, including opinions about Lifton's thesis, that he might not want published. That's understandable. She wants to be able to use the research someday. I told her I would much rather approach O'Neill through her, since they seem to be comfortable with each other. I don't want to impose upon her for a copy (like Lifton mooching), but I'm going to have to at least take a look at her transcript before I try asking him any questions, so it would make sense for me to simply go up there and have her introduce me and, if possible, sit in on the questioning. Told her I want to bring docs with me to question him on. Remember, Harold wants to know whether the surgery remark was spontaneous or simply a question Humes addressed to the gallery. But it now looks as though I'm going to have to cross-examine him as though I had him on the witness stand to see what he knows and what he doesn't know, then decide if he's telling the truth or lying.

He may have been stung by the implication that he and Sibert left early and didn't see everything that they should have seen. If he didn't know what an autopsy consists of, maybe he feels a little bit foolish now. He may be reacting to Lifton's book. He may be reacting to ancient charges by the critics, Specter, and his own deceased boss that he and Sibert didn't see the whole thing. He may understand that some people would prefer it if he had seen the whole thing

(fear?). I think he's lying to Peggy. I'm almost sure of it, and she didn't have the tools at hand to press him on this point. I have to break him or catch him in an obvious lie. Because if I can't break him or catch him in a lie, it means either that he is a participant in the cover-up or else my investigative hypothesis and all the evidence supporting it are plain wrong and the early published critics were basically correct.

Peggy says Toon sold the paperback rights to HT 1 himself and unilaterally. She doesn't like him either. Says he's very egocentric. I can see that, since he went on and on about himself. In connection with a brief discussion of rivalries and backstabbing among critics, I am sending her my recent Third Decade piece.

RBF